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ABSTRACT

Three dimensions of education--development of knowledge, training of mental abilities, and development of character--and their implications for social and individual good are discussed in this paper. Education is described as the process that prepares young people for their social inheritance through the transmission of societal values. A recommendation is that knowledge development should be based on cultural knowledge and should stress student effort over whatever interests the child already happens to have. Mental discipline, or learning how to complete responsibility, is the central premise of the training of mental ability. The first two dimensions contribute to character development, which transmits cultural and moral values through discipline. Education is based on the premise that knowledge does not give rise to a culture's character, but rather the character of a culture gives rise to its knowledge and direction. A conclusion is that failure to develop character and morality through education fails the fundamental premise of education--the preparation of the young to inherit and strengthen their society. (LMI)

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Kevin Walsh, Ph.D.

The complexity of today's education can often be frustrating to both parents and teachers. From the constant pressure of social forces, such as funding, to the ever present demand for excellence in achievement, it is quite easy in present day America to become overwhelmed by and with education.

However, when education is perceived as the process by which the immature of society are prepared to inherit that society it can be analyzed as having three interacting dimensions. Taken in their totality these three dimensions of education constitute the rightful social inheritance of all children within the society. Therefore, it is incumbent that all three dimensions be considered as equally important and that all three be successfully transmitted to the next generation for the good of society, as well as for the good of each individual to be educated.

The First Dimension of Education

The first dimension of education is the Development of Knowledge in children. Although this may sound like a simple truism about education, nothing could be further from the truth. The knowledge that the school focuses upon and transmits to the child is not a constant. Obviously, changes in society, as well as advancements in technology or new theories of learning in some instances force changes in the school curriculum. Such has been the case for the last three decades.

Certainly, technological advancements, most specifically, in the field of computer science, have had an impact on schooling and the curriculum. However, it has been the social forces which have

taken place in the last thirty years, in concert with currently promoted theories of knowledge and learning which have radically altered the knowledge children are presently exposed to in American schools. Simply put, the combination of these two elements initiated and systematically put in place the belief that the knowledge that children had been learning in schools prior to this time period was contradictory both to motivating them to learn and to their developing an appreciation for education!

Theoretically this belief promoted two concepts about knowledge and school curriculum. First, that whatever knowledge the child learned should be useful immediately in his present life. That is to say, whatever a child learned in school he should be able to use on the playground, in his home or in the neighborhood! This belief about knowledge was based on the simple premise that if a child could use his school curriculum in his every day life, he would both reinforce what he had learned and also would be motivated toward his school work because he would realize the importance of the knowledge he was introduced to in school. Practically speaking, this concept of knowledge reduces the importance of knowledge to its functionality. This belief can be traced back to John Dewey and the Progressive Education movement, who promoted the idea that education "is a process of living and not a preparation for future living."¹

As with many other ideas in education, in theory this concept of knowledge has great appeal. However, when put into practice it is totally inadequate, for when knowledge is reduced to mere functionality, cultural knowledge is for all intent purpose eliminated. That is, knowledge such as an understanding of the contributions of Columbus,

Washington, Jefferson and Lincoln among others is often reduced or eliminated from the Curriculum. Geography, other than that which relates to the child directly or in some concocted way, is down played in significance. The basics of grammar and punctuation are only introduced when they fit the child's expressed writing rather than as essential elements of expression.

Academically, the results of this theory have been devastating. However, the greater harm resides in the consequence that when a child is not introduced to his culture during his developing years he is denied access to a significant means by which he learns about his culture and subsequently about himself in relationship to it. In short, if a child is not given an understanding of his culture by means of its knowledge it results in his failing to understand and appreciate his culture and produces an adult who thinks only of himself, not for himself.

The second idea promoted by this theoretical belief about knowledge is that whatever the child is to learn should be in some way related to an already existing interest which he possesses. When this idea is transformed into practice too often it is interpreted, rightly or wrongly, by many people as a belief that the knowledge the child is to learn in school should be brought to him by means of methods which arouse emotions or at least entertains him. This practice is what has for years and years been "properly stigmatized as "soft" pedagogy"² and has resulted in putting interest and effort against each other rather than their becoming partners in the process of education.

There is no doubt that education should be preceived as being enjoyable but certainly not always entertaining, for some aspects of education are not only challenging but quite difficult. However, it is as a result of the effort to overcome difficulties that the learner develops perseverance and ultimately the joy found in having and completing responsibilities.

In truth, effort can not be made subordinate to interest in the process of education. Although the learner's effort is enormously aided by his interest, education cannot be limited to introducing only what knowledge the child is interested in learning or by attempting to sugar coat knowledge by wrapping it into some interest that exists within the child.

The Development of Knowledge as the first dimension of education mandates that the school curriculum be based upon the concept of cultural knowledge because it provides the learner with the opportunity to be introduced to and understand his culture. For today's educator cultural knowledge should not be seen as an end to be achieved by the learner in order to be considered educated but rather it should be envisioned as a means by which the learner not only gains greater control over his environment but also comes to gain identity with his culture.

The Second Dimension of Education

The second dimension of education the Training of Mental Abilities pertains to the developing of thinking, problem solving and discovery skills within the learner. There is little reason for schools to give the learner knowledge without teaching him how to use that knowledge in good and productive ways. Thus, educators must provide the learner with experiences which will enable him to be more efficient

and accurate in his solving of new and unique situations by utilizing the knowledge he is acquiring through the curriculum.

As has been presented knowledge cannot be limited to only that which is inherently interesting to the learner. However, such an analysis does not preclude the presenting of such knowledge by means of active experience on the part of the learner. Recent theories for the teaching of thinking emphasize that knowledge is important "as a way to conceptualize situations, to identify patterns, and to organize the information so that new problems in the subject area can be solved."³ Furthermore, today's psychologists emphasize teaching students problems for which the knowledge is useful and for understanding the conditions under which it applies.⁴ Psychological findings that reasoning can be taught and that different subject matters teach different kinds of reasoning support the view that thinking can be improved through knowledge and thus the curriculum.⁵ Quite clearly, thinking and knowledge acquisition are not separate domains but are in fact part and parcel of the same whole.

In addition to the thinking skills the Training of Mental Abilities includes the concept of developing "mental discipline" in the learner. However, "mental discipline" does not refer to the old concept proposed by faculty psychology whereby it was believed that various subjects developed various faculties in the mind. For example, the exponents of this antiquated doctrine believed erroneously that the study of Latin would be transferred to other subjects to be learned.

Today the developing of "mental discipline" in the child means teaching him to finish what he begins; to complete what he starts.

Too often in today's society the child desires and participates only in experiences which are entertaining and/or immediately gratifying. The result has been the development of greater and greater numbers of people in our society who have failed to develop the will power and determination necessary to succeed in today's highly competitive society. Thus it becomes incumbent on educators to instill within students "mental discipline" in the form of completing what they begin in order that they learn, what has been stated earlier, the joy found in having and completing responsibility.

The Third Dimension of Education

The third dimension of education is the Development of Character in the child. As Dewey stated, "it is a commonplace of educational theory that the establishing of character is a comprehensive aim of school instruction and discipline. Hence it is important that we should be on our guard against a conception of the relations of intelligence to Character which hampers the realization of the aim, and on the look-out for the conditions which have to be provided in order that the aim may successfully be acted upon."⁶

Tragically, for the past thirty years in education we have failed to be on the look-out for the conditions which have to be provided for establishing character in the young. Therefore, this once comprehensive aim of educational instruction and discipline has fallen by the wayside. In today's education establishing character in the young is not only ignored but for many considered to be not even in the preview of the school. Consequently, the problems in both society and the school with the young have steadily increased to the point of crisis.

Although we have stated that all three dimensions of education are equally important for education to be successful it is this third dimension which now demands center stage in our efforts to prepare the next generation to successfully inherit the culture and compete in today's Global Marketplace.

Although we have indicated that both the first and second dimensions are in need of change, it is the development of character which must take priority as we reconstruct today's education. America is not, even with all of its problems in education, falling behind in either knowledge or thinking capacity. However, weaknesses in our character and resolve have left us extremely vulnerable in the ever escalating war of international economic competition. Whether or not the culture continues in the future to progress both socially and economically will depend heavily on the moral fiber of its people. It is in fact the character of the American people which will be challenged in future years. Education must help to meet this challenge. Thus, schools for tomorrow must develop a process of discipline which lends itself to the development of character.

The end result of all discipline of children must be the development of character in the form of a social conscience. The American society will not successfully develop its children unless at the end of eighteen years of life they understand that they live in a society with others and therefore, that they are responsible for the good of that society. Hence, discipline of children cannot be limited merely to what punishments they suffer when they misbehave, nor the rewards they receive for good behavior. It cannot even be considered as the combination of these two. Discipline

must always be seen as the process of discipling. Consequently, it is the major responsibility of the American society to give its children their rightful social inheritance. That is to say that it is therefore the major responsibility of all parents and teachers; of all homes and schools to give children the morals and values that constitute the American way of life. Failure to do so will have two drastic consequences. First, without this development of character within in the children by means of morals and values of the culture they will come to maturity neither understanding nor appreciating the culture they have inherited. Furthermore, their social perspective will be controlled more by personal gain than social consciousness. Second, each individual who fails to have the morals and values, the character of the culture established in the foundation of his conscience during his developing years will spend his entire lifetime fruitlessly searching for self-worth and trying to discover whether or not life is worth living.

In short, the person who cannot identify with the totality of his culture becomes an alien within it. Feelings of isolation and self-absorption manifest themselves through personality and ultimately may lead to personal depression and disillusionment with life.

Schools for tomorrow must envision discipline as the means by which the developing child comes to understand his culture and his responsibility to his country and its underlying morals, values and principles. The Training of Mental Abilities and Development of Knowledge must be seen not as the aims of education but rather as contributions to the Development of a personal and National Character.

More than ever before in American history, education must concentrate on the fundamental belief that knowledge does not give rise to a culture's character but rather the character of a culture gives rise to its knowledge and direction. Educators must firmly believe that knowledge which produces technology without the subsequent development of morality will seriously harm the character of the culture. A process of education which excludes the development of character fails the fundamental promise of education - the preparation of the young to inherit and strengthen their society.

NOTES

1. Martin S. Dworkin, Dewey on Education (New York: Teachers College Press, 1959), p.22
2. John Dewey, Democracy and Education, (New York: Free Press, 1916), p.126
3. John D. McNeil Curriculum (Glenview, Illinois: Scott, Foresman and Company, 1990), p.291
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid.
6. Dewey, Democracy and Education, p.346